

Potential continuing drought has officials on edge

By Matt Weiser

State water officials are urging residents and local water agencies to begin preparing for the possibility that 2014 could be a third dry year.

The California Department of Water Resources issued the cautionary statement last week partly because the state will head into winter with hardly any surplus water in its reservoirs as a cushion against drought. That is because the cushion is being drained off by the dry year now under way.

Problems could be especially acute for small water systems that rely on groundwater, said Jeanine Jones, DWR interstate resources manager.

"Smaller systems don't have a lot of staff capacity, so often they don't even do such basic things as regularly monitor groundwater levels or maintain their wells," Jones said.

Read the whole story

Tablet manufacturers target toddlers

By Matt Townsend, Bloomberg

Toddler-safe texting has arrived.

Spurred by burgeoning demand for kid-styled tablets, LeapFrog

Enterprises Inc. and VTech Holdings Ltd. revamped their tyke-targeted devices to add features that let three-year-olds send short messages to grandma and even watch online videos without stumbling across websites kids shouldn't see.

"Exposing our children to the Internet at an early age is incredibly valuable, but how do you do it safely?" John Barbour, chief executive officer of Emeryville-based LeapFrog, said in an interview.

By tackling parents' fears about their kids going online, these toymakers are seeking to extend their dominance in a niche category of the booming tablet market that they created two years ago after releasing the first versions of LeapFrog's LeapPad and VTech's InnoTab.

With the added Web features in the recently released \$150 LeapPad Ultra and \$100 InnoTab 3s, they are also presenting more of an alternative to devices from Amazon.com Inc. , Samsung Electronics Co. and Apple Inc. in the larger market for tablets that is projected by researcher IDC to increase 34 percent to 67 million units shipped this year.

Read the whole story

Ex-South Tahoe man accused of murder

By Sarah Burge, Press-Enterprise

A former South Lake Tahoe resident was arrested on suspicion of murder last month at Patton State Hospital in San Bernardino after police say he fatally beat a fellow inmate.

George Aaron Carver, 40, who had been serving a criminal commitment at the mental hospital since 2011, was booked into the West Valley Detention Center in Rancho Cucamonga on Aug. 31, jail records show.

The name of the victim, who has been at the hospital for 17 years, was being withheld until his family could be notified, San Bernardino police said.

Read the whole story

El Dorado rethinking medical pot dispensaries

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

With a moratorium on new medical marijuana dispensaries in unincorporated El Dorado County set to expire at the end of October, the county Planning Commission has called for an ordinance to allow and regulate the facilities.

The commission at its Aug. 22 meeting objected to a proposed ordinance amendment, initiated by the Board of Supervisors, that would ban all medical marijuana distribution facilities.

“After about four hours of listening and discussion, it was the commission’s directive to allow the existing collectives that are in place today,” said commission Chairman Dave Pratt. “In a second motion, we asked the board to give us a shot at coming up with rules for collectives.”

Pratt suggested it is time for the county to start viewing medical marijuana dispensaries as tax-paying enterprises that can provide jobs and contribute to the local economy.

Fatality underscores importance of car seats

By Kathryn Reed

Not even a grandma's embrace is strong enough to save a child when the vehicle she is traveling in is involved in an accident.

Motor vehicle crashes are the No. 1 cause of death for ages 1-12. Two children in the United States die each day as a passenger in a vehicle, and 325 are injured. Those numbers could be cut in half if child seats were used, and used properly. These facts are from the U.S. Department of Transportation, based on 2010 figures, the latest available.

It's possible 3-year-old Caroline Maxfield of Colorado would be alive today had she been in a car seat. She died July 30 in a vehicle accident near Cave Rock.



This is one of three vehicles involved in an accident in July where a

toddler died. Photo/Provided

Three other children were asleep in the back of the Suburban that was involved in that three-vehicle collision. They survived.

The toddler was on the lap of her grandma with a seatbelt going across both of them. Not really being strapped in, this scenario is more like putting a child in a slingshot, according to officials.

"Sometimes people overlook safety and it has tragic results. That is what happened here," Eric Guevin with Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Science and engineering go into the design of car seats. A minimum safety standard must be adhered to in order for a manufacturer to be able to sell the seats.

But even when people use the seats, about 60 percent of the time they are not installed correctly, according to Guevin.

The July fatality has Tahoe Douglas on a campaign to educate parents about the importance of restraining their children in a vehicle – and doing so properly. Tahoe Douglas Fire is the only agency on the South Shore that does car seat safety inspections.

"Car seats are specially designed to transport the frailest of our passengers," Guevin said. "The five-point harness ... shoulders, hips and in between legs ... is the same as a racing harness. Pilots use it because of G force. It spreads the crash forces over a wider area."

Chris Lucas is one of the firefighters certified in car seat safety. He has spoken at Barton Health classes to tell expectant parents all about the seats. More firefighters are going to a training at the end of the month.

Each state has different requirements, with weight and height the main criteria.

The angle of the seat is important to prevent neck injuries. Making sure the seat doesn't move much is also important.

"Statistics show there is still a lot of misuse. And it's totally avoidable," Guevin said.

To contact Tahoe Douglas about a child car safety seat inspection, call (775) 588.3591.

Technology helping grocery store customers

By Andrea Chang and Tiffany Hsu, Los Angeles Times

Like many grocery shoppers, Michele Ricketts dreads long checkout lines.

But lately, she's been breezing by the cash register at her neighborhood Ralphs even with the usual crowds at the store.

"In the last month, I have noticed it was faster," said Ricketts, 27, an actress from the Miracle Mile. "I thought I was dreaming."

She wasn't. To shave precious minutes off wait times, Ralphs has been installing technology to measure foot traffic in nearly all of its supermarkets.

Known as QueVision, the system uses hidden infrared cameras with body heat trackers to figure out how many customers are shopping at any given time. Managers use that information to

redeploy workers to the cash registers when things get busy.

Read the whole story

Crews tally damage from Calif.'s 3rd largest fire

By Tracie Cone, AP

Scientists are assessing the damage from a massive wildfire burning around Yosemite National Park, laying plans to protect habitat and waterways as the fall rainy season approaches.

Members of the federal Burned Area Emergency Response team were hiking the rugged Sierra Nevada terrain Saturday even as thousands of firefighters still were battling the four-week-old blaze, now the third-largest wildfire in modern California history.

Federal officials have amassed a team of 50 scientists, more than twice what is usually deployed to assess wildfire damage. With so many people assigned to the job, they hope to have a preliminary report ready in two weeks so remediation can start before the first storms, Alex Janicki, the Stanislaus National Forest BAER response coordinator, said.

Team members are working to identify areas at the highest risk for erosion into streams, the Tuolumne River and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, San Francisco's famously pure water supply.

Read the whole story

Employment numbers don't tell the whole story

By Neil Irwin, Washington Post

If you only looked at the headlines on Friday's August jobs numbers, you'd think "Not bad!"

You would also be completely wrong.

Yes, the unemployment rate fell a notch to 7.3 percent, from 7.4 percent in July. Yes, the nation added 169,000 jobs, broadly consistent with the pattern of recent months.

But in almost all the particulars, you can find signs that this job market is weaker than it appeared just a few months ago, and maybe getting worse. The drop in the unemployment rate was caused by 312,000 people dropping out of the labor force. The number of people actually reporting having a job actually fell by 115,000 in the survey on which the unemployment rate is based.

And while the overall August jobs number was OK, the Labor Department revised down its estimates of June and July job creation by a combined 74,000 positions. In other words, through the summer, hiring has been quite a bit shakier than it had appeared.

Read the whole story

Water line replacement to bring fire suppression capability to Lukins Brothers customers



Terry Havey with Penhall Co. cuts lines Sept. 6 on 12th Street. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

A multimillion-dollar waterline project to bring Lukins Brothers Water Company customers fire protection started this week.

The 4-inch lines are being replaced with 12-inch lines.

Because the bank loan was secured later in the summer than anticipated, the first phase is being broken into two segments

to accommodate the limited time contractors may move dirt or asphalt in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The first 3,400 lineal feet will go in this year along 12th Street, Tahoe Island and almost to Big Pine. Another 2,600 lineal feet will be put in next summer along James Avenue and by Highway 89 and down West Way. This two-year first phase is \$2 million. This will give 40 percent of the 963 customers adequate fire protection.

Sixteen fire hydrants are also being installed.

Customers can expect to see a \$15 to \$25 surcharge on their bills starting in 2014. The CPUC guarantees the loan will be repaid via the 20-year surcharge.

Another change is that as the line goes in so will meters at the residences and commercial properties on those streets. State law says all customers must have meters by 2025.

“Customers will have more consistent water pressure,” Jennifer Lukins, who runs the company, told *Lake Tahoe News*. She said on peak days there are times when people don’t have full pressure.



Jennifer Lukins goes over the water line replacement plans.

When water districts first came about in Lake Tahoe and other places it was all about domestic use. Not fire protection.

The Angora Fire of 2007 helped Lukins get the attention of the California Public Utility Commission. As a private water company, it is the CPUC that oversees Lukins. The city manager of South Lake Tahoe at the time filed a complaint with the CPUC saying Lukins didn't have adequate capacity to handle a fire. That in turn allowed Lukins to begin planning the massive water line replacement.

The delay from 2008 planning to 2013 implementation has been money. While all phases of the project are not funded, the entire first phase is. In 2008, this was estimated to be a 20-year project. Starting five years later, Lukins won't venture a guess as to when all the work will be done.

Phase 2 is estimated to cost \$6.1 million. This would bring fire coverage to 75 percent of Lukins customers. This phase includes storage tanks and booster pumps.

If Phase 1 comes under budget, those dollars will go to Phase 2.

"Completion of Phase 1 opens up (funding) opportunities," Lukins said. "It opens the door to explore other opportunities."

With Tahoe Valley Elementary School now a customer of Lukins, it might mean a collaborative project with the school district. The school has two fire hydrants.

The possibility of a joint project with South Tahoe Public Utility District to put a tank on Gardner Mountain has been talked about.

The interties Lukins and STPUD have will remain. Those are in place in case the other needs an emergency supply of water. In Phase 3 another tie on Ruth Avenue is penciled in.

Local contractor Thomas Haen Co. hopes to have as few interruptions in water service as possible.

Lukins will be paying \$300,000 to repave the streets it tears up. The city a couple years ago put a law on the books making utility companies do more than a patch job after digging.

Commercial crayfish harvest policies changing

The potential to commercially harvest crayfish from the California side of Lake Tahoe is in the works.

Nevada has allowed this for a couple years. But California had a law preventing the sale or purchase of crayfish taken from Lake Tahoe. Gov. Jerry Brown on Sept. 6 repealed that law. Next up is for the state Department of Fish and Wildlife to allow the commercial harvest.

Scientists say crayfish are contributing to the lake's loss of clarity. So by allowing commercial fishing of them, it may help improve lake clarity.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report